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## Essentialism in Social Representations of Citizenship: an Analysis of Greeks' and Migrants' Discourse

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Abstract:	<p>Following a Social Representations approach, the article examines the representations of citizenship held by both migrants and Greek citizens in Greece, after the announcement of a heavily debated citizenship legislation. Essentialism, a way of representing social categories as holding an underlying essence that determines their characteristics, was used as an analytical tool to understand the inclusive or exclusive function of representations of citizenship towards migrants. Findings showed that Greeks construct representations based on ethnic, civic and cultural ideas, while migrants construct representation of citizenship based on civic and cultural ideas. Essentialism was a way of constructing ethnic and cultural representations of citizenship and functioned in both exclusive and inclusive, but assimilatory terms accordingly. Civic and cultural representations of citizenship were constructed in non-essentialist ways and functioned in inclusive ways. However, from Greek's perspective, civic inclusion was conditioned upon an often-questioned legality of migrants and upon cultural assimilation terms. It is argued that studying both the content and the essentialist/non-essentialist formulation of representations of citizenship is an important tool in understanding the politics of inclusion and exclusion of citizens in the social arena.</p>

## **Essentialism in Social Representations of Citizenship: an Analysis of Greeks' and Migrants' Discourse**

In March 2010, the Greek government introduced new legislation regarding citizenship and naturalization, the law 3838/2010 entitled: “Current provisions for Greek citizenship, the political participation of repatriated Greeks and lawfully resident immigrants and other provisions”. This legislation was regarded as the first, overdue step towards the design of an immigration policy in Greece (Christopoulos, 2013).

The legislation set criteria that for the first time moved away from “*ius sanguinis*” principles towards “*ius soli*” ones (Anagnostou, 2011), leading to heated public debates about the meanings and boundaries of Greek citizenship. These debates were fundamentally “an internal negotiation of the contours of Greek identity” (Tzanelli, 2006, p.30), of who should and who should not be called Greek and on which grounds. Such debates are particularly challenging in the Greek context. On the one hand, Greek national identity is predominantly based on an ethnic representation of the Greek nation (Chrysoschoou, 2009; Triandafyllidou & Veikou, 2002) and is commonly constructed against the ‘immigrant other’ (Figgou, Sapountzis, Bozatzis, Gardikiotis & Pantazis, 2011; Triandafyllidou & Veikou, 2002; Tzanelli, 2006). On the other hand, the intense political, social and economic crisis along with the rise of extremist right wing politics has intensified the pre-existing anti-immigration feelings in the country. In this challenging socio-political context, we seek to understand how citizenship is represented by lay actors and how such representations work to include or exclude migrants from the national community.

While citizenship has been the focus of social and political sciences, psychological research has been rather absent from these academic debates. Addressing calls for a more thorough social psychological understanding of citizenship (Condor, 2011; Haste, 2004) we follow a Social Representations approach, which aims at overcoming the dualism between the individual and the political (Elcheroth, Doise & Reicher, 2011) and highlights their interconnection. We therefore ask how social actors construct an understanding of citizenship within a particular socio-political arena and how such understandings impact on how they relate to other people and groups.

We focus particularly on the role of essentialism, a representational tool, whose link to citizenship has not yet been explored in citizenship research, despite being directly related to nationality and immigration debates. Essentialism is shown to demarcate social relations, draw inter-group boundaries, reinforce in-group identities and justify discriminatory intergroup relations (Holtz & Wagner, 2009; Yzerbyt, Corneille, & Estrada, 2001). By studying the use of essentialism we thus delve deeper into the political dimensions of knowledge construction, a need identified by Social Representations' theorists (author, in press).

Using this framework, we explore debates about Greek citizenship from the perspectives of two key stakeholders in representations of citizenship: Greek citizens and migrants. Our data consist of comments posted on the Greek Ministry of Internal Affairs website, following the announcement of the new legislation outlined above.

### **Citizenship in psychological research**

Existing research on citizenship in the social and political sciences provides detailed taxonomies of dimensions (e.g. Marshall, 1950), forms (e.g. Isin & Turner, 2002) and criteria (e.g. Ignatieff, 1993) of citizenship. This type of research predominantly adopts a state-centric perspective by focusing on how things are, or how they should be, on the level of political structures and institutions. Psychological research, on the other hand, by explaining citizenship behaviour through cognitive style and personality traits, has been critiqued for its focus on the individual level of analysis and for ignoring the role of the social context (Barnes, Auburn & Lea, 2004; Haste, 2004).

To address this dualism between the psychological and the societal, recent psychological work focuses on citizenship as a practice that is embedded in a context of social relations. This marks a shift in the study of citizenship as a social construction of rights, duties and entitlements that are subject to argumentation and debate. Adopting discursive psychological approaches, the starting point of this type of research is that citizenship is an “essentially contested concept” (Gallie, 1956, cited in Condor, 2011). As Shotter (1993) proposed: citizenship is a ‘living ideology’ and the ways that its meaning is negotiated and contested (i.e. the politics of representing citizenship) should take centre stage in social psychological analyses of citizenship. Hence the aim of this field of research is to understand “how do we construct individuals as citizens, and how do we construct the concept of citizenship itself” (Haste, 2004, p.414).

In line with calls for a more critical and dynamic study of citizenship, a number of studies have focused on how lay people construct citizenship in the everyday sphere of life (e.g. Di Masso, 2012; Dixon, Levine & McAuley, 2006) as well as the rhetorical and

ideological functions of these constructions (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). For example, Barnes and colleagues (2004) and Condor and Gibson (2007) conceptualized citizenship as a discursively constructed category that can serve as a resource for argumentation.

Nevertheless, there is still little research that follows this approach and examines constructions of citizenship specifically in relation to migrant rights and entitlements. Existing research shows that lay understandings of citizenship can be significant symbolic resources for arguing against the inclusion of migrants. Gibson and Hamilton (2011) for example showed that white English participants, when discussing immigration, constructed appropriate polity membership in terms of a public/private dichotomy which restricts minority cultures to the private sphere of life. 'Earning one's right' or 'making an effort' (Andreouli & Dashtipour, 2013; Gibson, 2009) have also been shown to be significant tropes in representations of British citizenship that can be used as discursive strategies for arguing against immigration in a seemingly rational way. In addition, state policies and practices on naturalisation advance particular representations of citizenship designating some citizens as more worthy than others (Andreouli & Howarth, 2013; Gray & Griffin, 2014).

Clearly, constructions of citizenship serve political and ideological functions. In immigration contexts they are commonly entangled with constructions of nationhood and as such, serve to demarcate the boundaries between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' based on criteria of deservingness, cultural compatibility or ethnicity, for example (Gibson & Hamilton, 2011; Triandafyllidou & Veikou, 2002). Moreover, such criteria are embedded within particular national histories, citizenship regimes and broader narratives of the nation (Andreouli & Dashtipour, 2013).

In this paper, we contribute to the psychological study of citizenship empirically and theoretically. Theoretically, the Social Representations approach adopted here complements existing research by providing a combined political and psychological understanding of citizenship. The political dimensions and implications of knowledge construction are further emphasized within the theory, as we will show, through our focus on essentialism as a representational tool. On the empirical level, while the scarce research that exists on the field focuses on majority discourses leaving aside migrants' perspectives on citizenship, we examine how both Greek citizens and migrants construct representations of citizenship. Finally, our focus is on the relatively under-researched context of Greece at a time of growing socio-political crisis and xenophobia. In the following sections we provide a short account of this context with regards to citizenship legislation issues and then move on to outline our theoretical framework and present our methodology and findings.

### **Contextualising citizenship: the Greek context**

Criteria of Greek ancestry (i.e. *ius sanguinis*) have been at the core of citizenship allocation since the national building processes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Anagnostou, 2011). This is reflected in the term “*ithagenia*” that has been used to refer to citizenship legislation from its outset until today, in the formation of the “Code of Greek *Ithagenia*”. “*Ithagenia*” contains the word “*genos*” which means descent or generation and originally was used to refer to the Orthodox population of the Ottoman Empire (Christopoulos, 2013). As Christopoulos notes, it is a term “reflecting *par excellence* the ethnic connotations of Greek nationality” (2013; p. 1, italics in the original).

In the late 1980's, Greece was found institutionally unprepared for receiving the first large flows of immigration from Albania and neighbouring Balkan countries and to a lesser extent from some Asian and African countries (Kassimis & Kassimi, 2004). Since the 1990's and until 2009 when the new legislation was first announced, arrangements of citizenship allocation were mainly regulative rather than policy-oriented. Criteria were restrictive and their discretionary character led to citizenship allocation decisions that could often be characterized as arbitrary (Anagnostou, 2011). Although from 2000 onwards certain reforms made the legislation less restrictive, until 2010 the criteria were largely entrenched into "historically bequeathed ideas [that] view Greek citizenship as a right to be exclusively reserved for those who ethnically belong to the cherished national community" (Anagnostou, 2011, p.2).

The 2010 legislation was regarded as a turning point in Greek immigration policy, setting for the first time in history criteria that moved towards "ius soli" principles. It retained most of the previous legal criteria. However, beyond facilitating and making more transparent the naturalisation process, it also contained certain important novelties regarding "one-and-a-half" (i.e. children moving to Greece after their birth), second and third generation migrants. The first two could acquire Greek citizenship for the first time through criteria related to their years of schooling and legal residence of their parents in Greece. Third generation migrants, whose parents had been born and legally resident in Greece, could automatically acquire Greek citizenship.

The legislation evoked a heated public and political debate in a time of intense economic and socio-political crisis. While supporters argued that it would serve as a means for migrants' integration, opponents maintained that it would encourage mass "illegal" immigration to the country (Anagnostou, 2011). Analysis of the parliamentary discourse



of the time (Figgou, submitted) reflects the controversies the legislation evoked. Far and centre right wing opposition parties, “New Democracy” and “LAOS”, intensely criticised the legislation asking for stricter criteria and for a referendum, accordingly.

Following these heated debates, in February 2011, the State Council questioned the constitutionality of the law and suggested reforms. Modifications to the law included withdrawing the innovative provisions for citizenship acquisition for one-and-a-half and second-generation migrants and migrants’ right to vote in local elections.

In this context of reform and debate, we are interested in exploring how migrants and Greeks converge or diverge in representing citizenship, and particularly in exploring the use and function of the representational tool of essentialism in constructing citizenship.

### **Social representations and essentialism**

Social representations, as systems of lay knowledge, enable people to construct meaningful knowledge about the social world and position themselves within that world (Moscovici, 1961/2008). As shown in Moscovici’s original study, social representations are intimately linked with patterns of communication and as such, they mediate social relations within and between groups. Importantly, social representations are dynamic systems of knowledge. They are socially elaborated in conditions of diversity where there are various, and often competing, perspectives on the issues at hand. The theory has thus been shown to be a useful tool for the study of the politics of representation (Howarth, 2006), namely, the contests and struggles over the meaning of significant social objects, such as democracy, participation and identity.

Social representations are ways of acting upon the world, for example, by reproducing or challenging gender asymmetries (Psaltis & Duveen, 2006), by allowing majorities to maintain the status quo (e.g. Philogène, 2007) or by enabling minorities to advance their version of the world (e.g. Howarth, 2009). In other words, the theory of social representations does not only seek to answer ‘what’ questions but also ‘what for’ questions (Jovchelovitch, 2007): questions about the ideological functions of advancing particular representations over others and the power struggles involved in instituting some representations as more valid than others, which is our interest in this paper. Taken together, these points suggest that the theory of social representations attempts to bridge the psychological with the political since it is concerned with the psychology of knowledge construction in particular political and ideological contexts (Elchereth, Doise & Reicher, 2011).

Our focus here is on a particular representational process, essentialism, which has recently attracted the interest of scholars seeking to understand the politics of exclusion and participation in the social arena (e.g. Wagner, Holtz & Kashima, 2009). Essentialism is a way of forming and deploying meanings, a “powerful and versatile tool in objectifying representations of social groups” (Raudsepp & Wagner, 2012, p.105), which is often implicated in the representational practices that shape the politics of identity and intergroup relations.

Essentialism refers to ways of representing social categories as if they possessed an underlying essence, a fixed property, which determines the attributes of the members of these categories. While earlier work approached essentialism as cognitive tool permitting people to reduce the complexity of the social world and make predictions about it (Medin & Ortony, 1989; Rothbart & Taylor, 1992), in this article we conceptualise it as an

ideological device, a representational tool, the study of which offers a socio-politically embedded understanding of knowledge construction.

Despite the concept's lack of precise definition (Haslam, Rothschild & Ernst, 2000), the literature concurs (Haslam et al., 2000; Wagner et al., 2009) in that essentialist categories are presented: (1) as natural by either alluding to biological factors (e.g. blood, genes) or to cultural and linguistic factors (e.g. cultural imprints); (2) as immutable and unchangeable by human intervention (3) as historically stable, having always existed in this form (4) as having inductive potential and informativeness: the essence determines the features of the members and allows people to make inferences about the characteristics of the members; (5) as discrete and their membership as exclusive (i.e. their members can either belong or not belong and usually they can exclusively belong to that category and not others); (6) as having an essence that is perceived as "necessary and sufficient criterion for membership" (Wagner et al., 2010, p. 233), without which one cannot be a member; (7) as homogenous, despite superficial variability. Researchers in the field argue that there is no generic essentialist structure, but different combinations of these characteristics may be used depending on the social category that is essentialised (Haslam et al., 2000; Morton, Hornsey & Postmes, 2009; Yzerbyt, Corneille, & Estrada, 2001).

In our conceptualisation we concur with recent work that emphasizes the ideological content and function of essentialist beliefs in discourse (Augoustinos, Hanson-Easey & Due, 2014; Figgou, 2013; Verkuyten, 2003; Wagner et al., 2009). In this literature, essentialism is seen as an ideologically laden and discursively constituted resource, a representational tool (Raudsepp & Wagner, 2012) with important political implications

that serves to justify action towards social groups and to legitimize or subvert existing social arrangements (Wagner et al., 2009; Yzerbyt, Rocher & Schadron, 1997).

Indeed, literature shows that essentialism serves to reinforce the identity of a social group vis-a-vis an out-group, by presenting the former as discrete, stable and homogenous, usually superior from other social groups (Wagner et al., 2009; Yzerbyt et al., 2001). It may also be used to justify exclusion of the out-group (Verkuyten, 2003). For example, Raudsepp and Wagner (2012) show that both Estonians and Russians in Estonia present their in-groups' essence as incompatible to the out-groups' rejecting the possibility of harmonious co-existence.

Essentialism may have both oppressive and liberating functions. Racist practices can be based on essentialism. For example, Australian press, radio and political discourse represents Sudanese refugees as holding a cultural essence that makes them violent or socially deviant (Augoustinos et al., 2014) and extreme right wing supporters in Germany represent Africans' and Whites' pro-creation as a disgusting hybridization of incompatible essences (Holtz & Wagner, 2009). However, many liberating discourses of contemporary identity politics may be based on essentialist representations used by a minority to subvert the power of the majority (Wagner et al, 2009). The multi-cultural discourse of respect to authentic cultural differences of various ethnic groups can draw on essentialist understandings of culture (Verkuyten, 2003). Similarly, the gay movement has sought social change on the basis that sexual orientation is genetically determined rather than personally chosen (e.g. Morton & Postmes, 2009). Equally, non-essentialist ideas may be used for both liberating and oppressive practices (Verkuyten, 2003). This strategic and variable use of essentialism (Figgou, 2013) highlights the different political

interests that guide essentialist constructions and point to the socio-political implications that essentialist constructions can have.

In light of these considerations, this paper examines the ways that essentialism is used with regards to a particular social category of membership, citizenship, and focuses on the ideological functions of essentialist representations of Greek citizenship in the particular context of arguing for migrants' exclusion or inclusion.

### **Methodology**

The data analysed here come from a large pool of 3403 comments of varying length (ranging from a few lines to 2-3 page long) published in the website of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (<http://www.opengov.gr/ypes/?p=327>), following the announcement of the aforementioned legislation regarding citizenship rights. These comments were part of a “public deliberation” as the Ministry called it, in which anybody could express their views that, as affirmed, would be taken into account for the final configuration of the legislation. The period allowed for commenting was 29 December 2009 - 7 January 2010. The particularities of the commentators should be acknowledged for contextualizing the analysis: people who wrote were aware of the possibility of public deliberation, had Internet access and possessed the linguistic resources to read and write in Greek. It is possible also that people who engaged in the process of commenting had strong motivation to express their views, being for example strongly for or against the governing party and the new legislation.

The choice of this form of virtual data versus other forms (e.g. parliamentary debates, media) lies in their informal and naturalistic character. In virtual contexts: “wide-spread

Social Representations [appear] in their natural form” (Raudsepp & Wagner, 2012, p. 111). The setting is more natural than in face-to-face interviews/focus groups and commentators express themselves without being interrupted. The researcher is a virtual ethnographer (Hine, 2000), unobtrusively examining the unfolding virtual interaction, with commentators exchanging views, agreeing and disagreeing with one another.

To construct a corpus of data for analysis, all 3403 comments were read and judging by the way commentators introduced themselves and signed their posts, we isolated 49 comments written by migrants and 3354 comments written by Greeks. We then constructed the sample purposively (Flick, 2009), selecting the comments that explicitly or implicitly defined citizenship by referring to what citizenship is or what it is not, who is entitled to it and under which criteria. This sampling method resulted in 85 comments written by Greeks and 36 comments written by migrants. The excluded comments did not specifically discuss the concept of citizenship; rather, they contained opinions about particularities of the legislation, about immigration and its consequences in general, about the government and other information that was not considered relevant. For the purposes of our analysis we have selected 10 comments that permit us to demonstrate most clearly the analytical ideas observed in the whole corpus and theorize the concept of essentialism.

A thematic analysis was first conducted (Attride-Stirling, 2001) in order to (1) identify the major ideas on which representations of citizenship were built by each group. Within these themes, the analysis focused (2) on identifying whether essentialism was used in constructing commentators’ representations and (3) on identifying the functions of

essentialist/non-essentialist formulations of representations according to the literature presented earlier.

In the following section we present a thematic analysis of discourse that (1) illustrates the three major themes we identified and exemplifies the different ways that these ideas were put forward to build multiple and contested representations of citizenship; (2) illustrates how essentialism was used to formulate these representations; and (3) discusses the ideological functions of these essentialist formulations of representations.

### **Essentialism in ethnic, civic and cultural representations of citizenship**

In our analysis, we identified three themes of ideas/criteria in constructing citizenship: ethnic, civic and cultural. Ethnic criteria were based on descent, civic criteria were based on civic rights and duties and cultural criteria were based on cultural participation and knowledge. In the following extracts we examine the ways in which essentialism is used to represent citizenship on the basis of these three, often interrelated and overlapping, themes. We name representations based on these three themes as ethnic, civic and cultural accordingly, acknowledging however that there is variability in the forms that each may take, and that, as we show, representations may be based on multiple criteria.

#### *The role of ethnic origin*

Formulating exclusively ethnic representations of citizenship was very common among Greek commentators but was completely absent in migrants' discourse. Ethnic representations were also most often constructed in essentialist ways, functioning as an ideological device for the exclusion of migrants from the Greek national community. Commentators represented citizenship as part of the natural order through extensive

reference to biological factors such as Greek blood and genes. These commentators referred to a distinction between two legally synonymous terms of the Greek language that both denote citizenship, in the sense of the legal bond connecting a person to a state: “ithagenia” and “ipikootita”. As we noted earlier, the term “ithagenia” reflects the *ius sanguinis* criteria dominating Greek citizenship legislation throughout its history. Commentators linked “ithagenia” to rights of birth and descent and differentiated it from the term “ipikootita” (which stems from the noun “ipikoos”, that is, the person who is subjected to the power of the state). Commentators associated “ipikootita” to civic rights and responsibilities. They argued against granting “ithagenia” to migrants because:

*You cannot grant ithagenia because, put it simply, you are born, not made Greek. Greek is the blood* (Yiannis the nationalist)<sup>1</sup>

The right to “ithagenia” and to be called Greek was reserved to those of common Greek descent and blood. Migrants could not be called Greek, but they could be granted recognition of civic rights and responsibilities, namely, “ipikootita”.

Politimi below, drawing also on the distinction between the two terms, supports that Greek descent is a necessary criterion for Greek identity:

*Nobody has the right to be called a Greek man and woman if he hasn't been born in Greece by Greek parents, Greek grandfathers, great grandfathers etc etc [...] All states grant ipikootita never ithagenia. It is blasphemous for*

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<sup>1</sup> We present all comments in *italics* and we use the following transcription conventions: we place within parentheses () the name that each commentator used to sign his/her comment. We use square brackets including three full stops [...] to indicate omitted text and we use plain square brackets [ ] to introduce an explanatory note.



*those who fought for the ideals of a country. It is a disgrace to be the first who will make Greek men and women the Iraqis, the Pakistanis, the Albanians, the Russians, the Chinese etc etc. It is a pity to lose so easily a nation with history, civilization and above all with values that have taught at times the entire world. It is a shame and disgrace for some to become Greek in the place of Greeks- Our ancestors' bones will be creaking (POLITIMI POLITIMI HELLAS)*

To strengthen her claim, Politimi argues that Greece should follow the example of other countries and not grant “ithagenia”. By drawing a rigid opposition (Gillespie, 2008) between the two practically synonymous terms, she is able to allow rights of citizenship recognition to migrants while reserving the right to being called Greek to only those of Greek descent. Implicitly, this opposition creates a hierarchy of citizenship rights, with “ithagenia” being a higher form to “ipikootita” (see also political discourse on the issue i.e. Figgou, submitted). Reference to this necessary criterion of descent, marked by the specific term of “ithagenia” makes the category of Greek discrete (Haslam et al., 2000) from other national identities.

In Politimi's account, citizenship is an essence that is inherited from generation to generation, by Greek ancestors who fought for the sovereignty and ideals of the nation. Contemporary Greeks, by supporting “ithagenia” for migrants of various listed ethnicities (mentioned dismissively with “etc. etc.”), dishonour their ancestors and threaten the nation with extinction. This idea is emphasized through reference to the superiority of the Greek nation (i.e. a nation with history, civilization, values that teaches other nations), through repeated use of words, such as “blasphemy”, “pity”, “disgrace”, which note that

granting citizenship to migrants is a destructive thought that Greeks should not entertain (Gillespie, 2008) and through dramatic imagery (i.e. ancestors bones creaking). Finally, Politimi's reference to ancestors implies that the Greek essence is historically stable and immutable (Raudsepp & Wagner, 2012), unaltered by human intervention, passing from an unspecified point in the past, throughout the centuries, to the present. Politimi's discourse illustrates how debates of citizenship are closely intertwined with representations of nationhood (Yuval-Davis, 2006); it is within the frame of nationhood that these debates can be understood. Her discourse echoes ideas about the eternal existence and homogeneity and superiority of the Greek nation that have also been identified also in Greek history textbooks (Fragoudaki & Dragona, 1997).

Thus, Politimi's and Yiannis' comments depict an essentialist representation of citizenship that is based on ethnicity and excludes migrants on the basis of ideas regarding nature, historical stability, immutability, discreteness and the existence necessary criteria of membership. The Greek essence exists in the blood, which is inherited only by Greek ancestors. It is immutable and historically stable, dating back to an unspecified time. Possessing it is a necessary criterion for inclusion that cannot be acquired through human intervention. This essence creates a discrete boundary between who is and who is not Greek, which is given the specific name of "ithagenia".

#### *The role of civic participation*

Both Greek and migrant commentators formed civic representations of citizenship based on criteria of civic participation. Contrary to ethnic representations, a civic understanding did not rest on essentialist differences between "us" and "them" but rather defined belonging irrespective of ethnicity, culture or race. Those representations were formed in

non-essentialist ways that often functioned in inclusive ways towards migrants' citizenship rights.

In the account below, Ntarin, a migrant commentator, constructs citizenship on the basis of economic contribution to the Greek state:

*We pay all this tax, pension, we participate in the Greek market and we study and yet we have no right to citizenship? (Ntarin)*

Ntarin challenges the legitimacy of migrants' status in Greece by advancing a civic understanding of citizenship. Citizenship is represented as a give-and-take matter: when migrants contribute to Greek society (by paying taxes and participating in the economy), they ought to have the right to be citizens of the country. The question mark at the end of this extract suggests that it is unreasonable and unfair that the Greek state does not grant migrants this right.

Greek commentators also talked about fulfilment of civic duties as criterion for the inclusion of migrants. However, these civic criteria could be presented as being priori violated by the illegal entry of migrants in the country, as in the comment below.

*I think that it should be a condition of citizenship [for migrants] to have been working legally (insured) in our country for a number of years [...] This condition will reduce uninsured employment and will function as a motivation for migrants wishing to acquire Greek citizenship. We must not forget that these people acquire a European identity and therefore they will be able, if*

*they so wish, to move within EU countries, with positive consequences. Before the law is implemented, however, there should be a reduction of the massive influx of illegal migrants in our country, otherwise there is a danger that they will increase. (Vassilis Tsitonakis)*

Vassilis focuses on legal work as a prerequisite for citizenship. He stresses that there are benefits for both migrants and Greeks in granting citizenship (i.e. free movement in EU countries, reduction of insured employment). Although this representation of citizenship is seemingly inclusive, it is formed in such a way that it permits Vassilis to argue that migrants fail to fulfil their duties of legal and insured employment. Reference to “massive influx of illegal migrants” and the “danger that they will increase” creates an exaggerated (Pomerantz, 1986) and generalized representation of immigration as massive, illegal and threatening, thus, unwelcome.

Ideas about illegality and the notion of the “uninvited guest” are in line with existing research on representations of asylum seekers and other migrants, both in the Greek context, where they are represented as criminal and violent (Figgou et al., 2011; Pavlou, 2001) but also generally in Western societies (Hanson-Easey & Augoustinos, 2010) where they are represented as illegal or bogus and opportunist (Lynn & Lea, 2003).

Civic criteria were sometimes entangled with ethnic ones to build representations of citizenship, as in Ilias’ post below:

*What makes you Greek is the blood that my ancestors shed in the fights of Kilkis-Lahana, Eski-Sehir, the fortress of Roupel, during Resistance, Cyprus*

*and the never-ending economic sacrifices of 10 and 20 generations back, who paid taxes and social security contributions for foreigners to enjoy TOO the social state (Ilias)*

Ilias draws on ideas of blood and ancestry, referring to “his” ancestors who shed their blood in a series of past well-known wars of the Greek history. These sacrifices are what, in Ilias’ view, make somebody Greek. In the remainder of his comment, these sacrifices are complemented by economic sacrifices. Tax and social security contributions are mentioned here as civic obligations that need to be fulfilled for somebody to be Greek. Despite the potentially inclusive function of the reference to civic criteria, Ilias does not leave any room for migrant inclusion into citizenship rights through reference to ethnic lineage. He refers to Greeks’ civic contribution as dating back 10 and 20 generations, implying that no migrant could ever reach such a level of contribution to the country. Although they do not fulfill these criteria, Ilias argues, they too enjoy, unjustly, the social welfare of the state today. In this extract, ethnic and civic conditions for citizenship are added up to illustrate the superior entitlement of ethnic Greeks.

On the whole, civic criteria were most commonly used to form non-essentialist representations of citizenship and such representations were potentially inclusive. However, from the Greek citizens’ perspective, these civic duties were sometimes intertwined with representations of illegality and with ideas about ethnic origin as a criterion for citizenship. Thus, within a seemingly inclusive rhetoric, migrants were often ultimately excluded.

*The role of cultural knowledge and participation*

Culture featured in representations of citizenship that were formed in both essentialist and non-essentialist ways. Essentialist constructions of citizenship were based on two ideas: presenting being Greek as an inevitable category of membership and constructing national/cultural identities as mutually exclusive. On the other hand, non-essentialist constructions rested on the idea of cultural participation leading to either a plural understanding of Greekness or an assimilatory one.

The essentialist way of using culture in constructing representations of citizenship was based on ideas of ethno-cultural transformation: citizenship can be granted to those, mainly second-generation migrants, who have been transformed into Greeks. Since people are not presented as determined by biology and by the ethnicity of their ancestors and since identity change is possible through cultural moulding (Verkuyten, 2003), this idea seems to de-essentialise citizenship and function in inclusive ways towards migrants. Nevertheless, the possibility of change in identity should not be equated with the absence of essentialism (Figgou, 2013) and culture-based representations of citizenship should not be equated a priori with unconditional acceptance of immigrants (Reijerse, Van Acker, Vanbeselaere, Phalet & Duriez, 2013). Indeed it has been shown that constructions of cultural difference can be reified in the same way as racial categories by naturalising intergroup divisions (Durrheim & Dixon, 2000) or by replacing race with culture to “dodge the identity of prejudice” (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Our data also show that culture can be essentialised in a similar way as ethnic origin.

In our data, the idea sustaining a cultural representation of citizenship is that migrants who have grown up in Greece, went to Greek school and socialized with Greeks, have

naturally and inevitably become Greek. Becoming Greek is presented as an essentialist transformation that is beyond their control and cannot be undone (Wagner et al, 2009). Interestingly, commentators sustaining this representation talked about being and feeling Greek. As noted by Edwards (1999) feelings can be used as resources to support claims; here claims of being Greek, of holding the necessary criteria for citizenship acquisition. Although Greek commentators made reference to migrants as people who “feel and are Greeks” (Kiki L) and should thus be granted citizenship, alluding to feelings was also found in migrants’ discourse. Maria for example commented:

*I feel Greek to the bone, I do my cross, I go for a coffee almost every day, I go to Greek music nightclubs and when I sing the Greek national anthem I cry. I don't know the anthem of Senegal and that's because in my heart there is only Greece* (Maria)

Maria “proves” her Greekness by emphasizing how deep her feelings are and through a number of everyday cultural practices that she follows. References to feelings (i.e. feeling Greek “to the bone”, crying at signing the Greek national anthem) are references to internal states, invisible truths that can be neither denied nor verified; they have to be accepted at face value (Verkuyten & de Wolf, 2002). They are also inevitable, uncontrollable (Verkuyten & de Wolf, 2002): one cannot control or choose to feel Greek, it just occurs. Depending on the context, feelings may be used to support an enduring, deep-rooted disposition, as in the comment above (Edwards, 1999), as opposed to an occasional, situational expression. We suggest that this reference to feelings supports the existence of an invisible essence, determining people beyond their control. In other

words, this essence is immutable and has inductive potential (Haslam et al, 2000; Wagner et al, 2009).

Alongside reference to feelings, this essentialist way of constructing representations was also supported by ideas of exclusivity of belonging as a proof of “Greekness”. Such arguments were put forward by both migrant and Greek commentators. Maria above refers to knowing the Greek anthem but not the Senegalese. Other migrant commentators emphasized exclusivity of membership by noting that they “haven’t known another homeland” (Christiana).

Thus, while this essentialist representation may seem to work inclusively, by supporting citizenship rights to those migrants who feel and have thus become Greek, it does so in assimilatory terms (Reijerse et al., 2013). This essentialist understanding of culture in representations of citizenship becomes more evident when culture and ethnicity become indistinguishable in the representations of some commentators. This was often the case in the comments of Greek citizens (but never the case in comments by migrants):

*A BIG NO to granting ithagenia and political rights to foreigners who are NOT Greeks, are not related to Greek values and customs, tradition, our way of life, our Orthodoxy, our history. I believe that it is too bad that there are already too many foreigners in Greece and I ask for their expulsion because the Greek element is altered, the Greek blood is mongrelized and our traditions are forgotten. (Ioannis)*



Ioannis starts by declaring his strong opposition to citizenship rights using capital letters and maintains the capital letters to emphasize that migrants are not Greeks. His argument is supported through a reference to cultural criteria (i.e. values, tradition, customs, way of life, religion and history) that in his view are not fulfilled by migrants; in fact, they are employed to argue that migrants have nothing in common with Greeks. Ethnic criteria are also put forward in his essentialist references to a “Greek element” and “Greek blood”, both of which are presented as essences that are altered and mongrelised due to the presence of foreigners in the country.

The non-essentialist way of constructing cultural representations of citizenship was based on criteria of cultural participation instead of transformation. The differences between this non-essentialist and the essentialist construction rest on the following: first, in contrast to ideas of exclusivity and discreteness that were part of the essentialist constructions, the non-essentialist does not contain the idea that cultures are discrete and mutually exclusive. On the contrary, having multiple cultural and national identities was seen as feasible, albeit not always as legitimate from the perspective of Greek commentators. Second, there is no reference to ideas of immutability, namely inner feelings that determine somebody’s identity and thus citizenship status beyond control or willingness; rather, ideas regarding choice and willingness are emphasized.

Take, for example, Monica, a migrant commentator:

*Why? Our first and mother tongue, Greek.*

*Our religion, Christian Orthodox.*

*We have studied in Greek schools and universities.*

*We grew up with Greek food, music and culture. [...] But it doesn't cease to amaze me how there is no Greek family without migrant relatives and how they are all so happy when they [Greek migrants abroad] win awards or a position in the American government. But God forbid, should we have Greek-Nigerian citizens because we will be extinct as a nation (Monica)*

Monica puts forward cultural criteria to assert her right to Greek citizenship: Greek language as a mother tongue, religion, food and music. However, contrary to the essentialist construction, Monica argues for a more plural understanding of Greekness that would embrace Greek-Nigerians as part of the Greek nation. To support her argument, she refers to Greek migrants abroad whose integration and success Greeks applaud. Referring to common experiences of immigration is used here to claim common in-group membership with Greeks (see Sapountzis, Figgou, Bozatzis, Gardikiotis & Pantazis, 2013) and also to expose the unreasonableness of Greeks, who while being content with the success of Greek migrants abroad, are afraid that naturalizing migrants of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds will lead to the “extinction” of the Greek nation. Overall, while Monica justifies the naturalization of migrants on criteria of cultural participation, she does not see cultural boundaries as impenetrable and mutually exclusive, thus, she constructs a non-essentialist cultural representation of citizenship.

This becomes more evident in Joa's comment below:

*I've been recently asked whether I feel Greek. The answer is I feel many things. It's not just one but certainly I am Greek TOO. And what I want above*

*all is to be able to discover on my own, autonomously, now and in the future*  
(Joa)

While Joa alludes to feelings, as commentators who forged representations in essentialist ways, she presents a pluralistic understanding of national identity. One does not have to be Greek *only*, but can be Greek *too*. Moreover, being Greek is presented as a personal choice rather than an inevitable consequence of having lived in Greece.

However, non-essentialist representations of citizenship could also work as symbolic devices for an inclusion in principle but exclusion in practice. This was the case in the accounts of Greek commentators whereby the terms of inclusion, on the basis of cultural participation, were largely assimilatory:

*So, if migrants want to become a member of our society, they have firstly to learn our language AND use it! Also, they have to understand and assimilate fully into our way of life and our culture, our beliefs and ideals as a people. So they have to learn that this is Greece, our land and our way of life, and we have to offer every opportunity to migrants to also enjoy it and share it. But, if migrants are not satisfied, then they are free to go! We didn't bring them here by force. They chose to come. So they should accept the country they have chosen* (Yiorgos L.)

For Yiorgos, citizenship means assimilation. As Greece belongs to the (native) Greeks (“this is Greece, our land and our way of life”) migrants are given no other choice but to assimilate. As Verkuyten (2003) notes, arguments supporting assimilation can be part of a

non-essentialist representation of culture as they presuppose a broken link between ethnic origin and culture. In the extract above assimilation is not seen as inevitable, it is a choice. In fact, it is the element of choice that makes assimilation a legitimate and imperative demand in this extract. Because migrants move to Greece on their own free will, it is their responsibility to adopt the Greek way of life and not Greek people's responsibility to accommodate and accept diverse cultures. A non-essentialist formulation is thus built on the ideas that cultural categories are seen as permeable and de-naturalised and there is choice and lack of inevitability in becoming a member.

Thus, culture featured in formulating representations in both essentialist and non-essentialist ways. Essentialist constructions from both migrants and Greeks suggested inclusion of migrants, albeit with assimilatory ideas of being transformed into a Greek. Non-essentialist constructions put forward by migrants and Greeks were oppositional. Most often, migrants argued for inclusion on the basis of holding multiple national identities while Greeks did the opposite: they argued for inclusion in principle, albeit upon largely assimilatory terms of fully complying with a Greek way of life.

### **The politics of essentialism in citizenship representations**

Concerns regarding immigration in Europe are on the rise. These concerns are very often reflected on citizenship legislation and particularly on discussions regarding the requirements to acquire citizenship (Reijerse et al, 2013). Passing a knowledge-based test or swearing an oath of allegiance to the state are requirements used by many European countries, in a context of concerns regarding migrants' ability to integrate. The constant reforms of citizenship legislation in Greece reflect similar concerns and divisions within both the public and the political arena, in social conditions of socio-political instability

and rising xenophobia. Under these circumstances, examining how people understand citizenship and appreciating the implications of this understanding for practices of citizenship, becomes a prominent need, albeit an under-researched topic in psychology (Condor, 2011).

Adopting a Social Representations approach, we examined how citizenship representations are constructed particularly in relation to migrant rights, a field largely unexplored in research, especially from the perspectives of both migrants and native citizens. A Social Representations approach, we argue, overcomes the existing dualism in understanding citizenship, which emphasizes either its political dimensions or focuses on individual-level psychological explanations. The focus on essentialism as a representational tool in constructing citizenship, we argued, further highlights the politics of knowledge (Elcheroth et al, 2011): the political interests, functions and implications of knowledge construction. Our aim was examining: (1) the meanings through which representations of citizenships were built in the context of debates among lay actors around migration in Greece (2) whether these meanings were formed in essentialist or non-essentialist ways and (3) the ideological and political functions of these representations in suggesting inclusion or exclusion of migrants. We outline the contribution of each of these aims to the literature subsequently.

In the particular context of debates around migrant rights, we identified three main ideas that formed the basis for constructing representations of citizenship: ethnic origin, civic participation and cultural knowledge and participation. Our findings concur with recent research that moves beyond the ethnic/civic dichotomy and stresses the role of culture in representations of citizenship (Reijerse et al, 2013). Investigating further the role of

culture is imperative as concerns about protecting the national culture in the face of immigration are increasing in Europe (Reijerse et al, 2013) and cultural knowledge has become a prominent criterion for membership in citizenship legislation. Representations based on culture, as our findings suggest, may be more inclusive than representations based on ethnic origin, which are exclusive, but the terms of inclusion may be assimilatory, resting on assumptions of becoming like the natives. At the same time, civic representations of citizenship, as we showed, are not necessary inclusive, since they may be intertwined with representations of migrant “illegality”. However, our research also highlighted that representations of citizenship may combine ethnic, civic and cultural ideas; these are not three distinct social representations but rather are intertwined ideas within a complex representational system (Rose, Efram, Gervais, Joffe, Jovchelovitch & Morant, 1995). It is by identifying the content of these different representations of citizenship in particular argumentative contexts that research can explain how they relate to politics of inclusion/exclusion of migrants and policy makers can target and challenge these understandings in contextually sensitive ways.

To engage in more detail at the level of meaning, we focused on essentialism as a way of formulating meaning about social categories. The role of essentialism in lay constructions of citizenship has not been explored in research so far. In our data, essentialism was a way of representing citizenship in ethnic and cultural (but not civic) terms. As we showed, essentialism was not straightforwardly associated with either inclusion or exclusion of migrants in our data; it had mainly oppressive but also liberating functions (Figgou, 2013; Verkuyten, 2003). Constructing citizenship in essentialist ethnic terms as something acquired through ancestry and blood relations had an exclusive function. At the same time, essentialist ideas of cultural transformation functioned in inclusive ways.

Beyond determining whether essentialist constructions suggest inclusion or exclusion in particular contexts, we argue that studying essentialism, as an ideologically laden, representational process has broader socio-political implications that deserve consideration. Essentialist constructions present categories as fixed and unalterable, beyond the control of individuals. Citizenship formed in essentialist ways, through, for example, ideas of blood and ancestry, is a category that cannot be altered by societal changes, such as migration, or human choices, such as governmental decisions and social struggles. It thus allowed an unwavering claim of “native supremacy” (Di Masso Castrechini & Valera, 2014) on the part of Greeks in our data. Further, citizenship discourses that allude to feelings or national consciousness whether in lay or institutional form (i.e. citizenship interviews that test commitment or loyalty to the nation) move the discussion away from objective, tangible criteria of citizenship membership (i.e. years of residence) to subjective and possibly arbitrarily defined and applied criteria. Essentialism is thus a powerful tool in representing citizenship that is ideologically laden and can have important socio-political implications: it is strategically employed according to the political interests of those who use it and indirectly creates or limits the possibilities of participation within the social arena.

We encourage research that examines representations of citizenship specifically in the context of migration. The arrival of new potential citizens puts at stake existing representations of nationhood and citizenship (Yuval-Davis, 2006), which are subsequently debated and negotiated in the social arena. Although there is research that touches upon the issue (e.g. Condor & Gibson, 2007; Gibson & Hamilton, 2011), it

largely focuses on how native citizens view citizenship rights in relation to migration, omitting the migrants' perspective.

Our findings indicate that studying both perspectives may reveal that there are divergences and power differentials in how different stakeholders form and legitimise representations of citizenship in the social arena. Greeks for example used arguments of ancestry, while migrants could not. Arguments of civic obligations and rights were formed by both migrants and Greeks but criteria were often considered by Greeks as violated a priori by "illegal" migrants. Finally, culture was present in both migrants' and Greeks' discourses but its use set assimilatory standards that asked migrants to become or feel like natives. Future research that examines how these differentials are asserted and legitimised through meaning structures can highlight the limitations that certain groups encounter in claiming and enacting their citizenship rights in the social arena.



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